

# A VISIT TO THE HOME OF MAGNUS

By David Stachnik

During my recent trip to this year's (2007) Nürnberg Spielwarenmesse (Toy Fair), I was able to schedule a visit to Magnus Modelleisenbahnfabrikation in Putzbrunn. Tuesday morning was rainy with temperatures in the low 40s as I ran out the hotel door and down the steps to the U-Bahn Station and headed to the Nürnberg Hauptbahnhof (Main Train Station) to catch the 8:02 ICE Train to Munich. Up the escalator from the subway, a quick check of the Departure Board and out to the platform. The #521 pulled in right on time; I climbed aboard and found my seat. As the train pulled out of the station it quickly picked up speed as it left the city and headed non-stop to Munich. The rails between Nürnberg and Munich have recently been upgraded to accommodate the high speeds of this the third and latest generation of ICE Train. The journey was scheduled for a very quick hour and two minutes.

For those readers not familiar with Magnus and their large-scale metal trains packed in the big steel boxes, here is a brief history of the Company. Christian Höhne founded Magnus in 1976 in the small city of Putzbrunn outside of Munich with the express purpose of producing high quality, hand-built locomotives. One of his first tasks was the production of a series of Narrow Gauge locomotives in 1:22.5 Scale for E.P. Lehmann Patentwerk. Starting in 1977 until 1983, there were seven different locos produced, one per year, 100 units per loco. To say that the selection of locomotives chosen for production was an esoteric collection is a true understatement. All were based on narrow-gauge prototypes operating on different railroads around the globe. The wheel arrangements were as interesting as the road names as you

can see in the attached chart. For additional information on these locomotives, please consult the Official Guide To LGB by Bob Roth and Decker Doggett (published by Kalmbach Books in 1998).

During this time Herr Höhne started to produce locomotives and rolling stock based on Standard Gauge prototypes but also in 1:22.5 Scale. To be true Standard Gauge in this scale necessitated a new track gauge of 64mm (1:22.5 Scale Narrow Gauge prototypes operate on 45mm track). A new name was needed for this line of very, very big model trains. Großbahn just didn't work. A more International name was needed. Looking to Latin the word for groß or big was magnus. That was it--Magnus-Bahn. To this day the company continues to produce the Standard Gauge or Regelspur for 64mm track along with its line of Narrow Gauge or Schmalspur for 45mm track.

## MAGNUS/LGB HAND-BUILT LOCOMOTIVES

- 1977— SOUTH AFRICAN RAILWAYS 2-8-4 CLASS 24 with 12- WHEEL VANDERBUILT TENDER
- 1978— CAMINHAS de FERRO MOCAMBIQUE 2-6-2 + 2-6-2 GARRATT
- 1979— BRIDAL VEIL LUMBERING COMPANY 2-6-6-0 MALLET
- 1980— GIRADOT RAILWAY of COLUMBIA 2-6-6-2T KITSON MEYER MALLET
- 1981— ARGENTINE STATE RAILROAD 4-8-2 with CONDENSER TENDER
- 1982— INDIAN STATE RAILWAYS SR 2-8-2 MIKADO
- 1983— TUNGPU RAILWAY of CHINA 2-10-0 DECAPOD

The first models produced by Magnus were quite simple in details. As the company gained experience and because of the demands of its customers, the quality and attention to detail quickly advanced. Improvements were incorporated into production immediately. The electrolytic galvanized sheet steel used in building the frames and bodies of the various locomotives and cars is the same quality that Audi uses in the production of its automobiles. The casings are precision welded after they go through the stamping and embossing processes. The final details are added with custom cast metal and plastic parts. All Magnus product rolls on high quality ball-bearing wheel-sets. Then in 1983, at the request of their American Distributor, Magnus began to produce locomotives and rolling stock for the U.S. Market in addition to the German and Swiss prototypes that were the staples of their catalog. This production included switcher locomotives, boxcars and cabooses for the Union Pacific® and the Southern Pacific® Railroads (built to run on 64mm track) and a K-27 and a K-37 locomotives for the Rio Grande® (built to run on 45mm track).

That's a quick history of Magnus, now we return to the journey. The train pulled into the Munich Hauptbahnhof right on time. I walked down the platform and across the station looking for the right U-Bahn. The sign pointed the way to the U5. Out the door of the station and into a wet snow/rain mixture with temperatures much colder than back in Nürnberg. I sure hadn't dressed properly for this weather. Nothing to do but to plunge onward. I found the stairs to the U5 and headed for the platform. I bought a tageskarte (day ticket) and caught the U-Bahn headed for the end of the line, Neuperlach Süd. Like in most German cities, the subway was clean and efficient. The train rolled into the last stop and I went down the stairs to look for the #212 Bus for the final segment of the journey to Putzbrunn. I found die Bushaltestelle (bus stop) but also found out that I had just missed the bus and had a 45 minute wait for the next one. Back into the U-Bahn Station to find a place to sit down and while away some time. Finally, it was time for the bus. On this bus, as on most forms of transportation in Germany, was a video screen announcing the upcoming stops. When

the bus approached the stop for Michael Haslbeckstraße, I knew it was time to get off.

I walked down the street past office buildings and into a residential neighborhood. There, near the end of the street was the World Headquarters of Magnus Modelleisenbahnfabrikation. I walked through the gate in the fence and up to the front door. I opened the door and entered, not knowing what to expect. It was dark inside. I called out a Hallo! Out of nowhere came Christian Höhne to meet me. We exchanged greetings; he turned on the lights and said that I was free to explore the workshop. Wow! I'm the kid in the candy store.

Where do I start? Two things impressed me right away. The building was really small and there was a lot of equipment and inventory in it. I started down one aisle—stacks of hopper car bodies, stacks of coach bodies, stacks of locomotive bodies. Down another aisle—parts, parts and more parts. I came around a corner and there was Herr Höhne at a milling machine fine-tuning the driving wheels for a locomotive that he was building. He continued to work as I tried to stay out of his way. After about an hour or so of wandering and watching, Herr Höhne informed me that he would be closing for lunch and that I was welcome back after he reopened. He recommended a little bistro across the street for lunch.

Back out into the cold and wet. I crossed the street and ducked into the bistro. The first thing I heard was the song Marie, Marie by the Blasters, a California rockabilly band, playing over the speakers. An interesting juxtaposition of cultures. I sat down and ordered the house special, Wiener schnitzel. That and a bier, what a tasty meal for such a wet and cold day. After about a half an hour I headed back to the shop.

Herr Höhne's wife met me at the door and asked if I wanted some coffee. I am not much of a coffee drinker but I needed something to warm me up. We carried on a conversation, her in German with some

English, me in English with some German. She showed me the way to the basement and the display areas. Here were the finished results of everything I had seen upstairs. German, Swiss and American equipment. Standard Gauge and Narrow Gauge. Flat cars, gondolas, tank cars and boxcars. Steam and diesel locomotives. Some were weathered and some were as shiny as the day they rolled out of the paint shop. I walked into the layout room. Here I saw such trackside structures as a water tower and a coaling tower, each one massive yet extremely detailed and built out of metal. If that wasn't enough, there was a pair of Southern Pacific Switchers pulling a consist of Pacific Fruit Express Reefers on 64mm track. Talk about your large-scale trains.

I walked back upstairs to continue exploring. I found the paint shop. I was disappointed that nothing was being painted that day. But there were a number of items that had just come through the process. I stumbled across the only other worker in the shop that day as he was assembling another locomotive. I watched him as he painstakingly took various pieces and parts and put them all together. I walked into another room. More machinery that does things for which I haven't a clue. More car bodies piled almost to the ceiling. As I go through another door I find Herr Höhne in the parts room pulling a multitude of items out of various drawers and boxes. I follow him and find out that these are part of the final details going on the locomotive that is nearing completion.

Time has flown since I arrived here at Magnus. I've got to get back to Nürnberg. Herr Höhne and his wife offer to drive me to the U-Bahn Station so I won't have to wait for the bus in the rain and snow. The three of us hop into his tiny 5-speed Fiat and off we go rolling through Putzbrunn headed for the station in Neuperlach. After arriving at the station, good-byes are exchanged, I thank the Höhnes for the hospitality they have shown me and dash up the stairs to the platform to begin my trip back to Nürnberg. What a great day this has been!